

who have been to the field a lot, and these stories of just incremental change that add up to something different over time, they're prevalent. The best messengers are the people who are actually there.

What's interesting about the world in which we live is, there's no question there's the electronic media that people watch, but there's also the blogosphere. You're on it, I know; you're hearing from people, your son's comrades that are constantly e-mailing you. There's a lot of information that's taking place that is causing people to have a different picture of what they may be seeing on TV screens. See, this enemy of ours is very effective; they're smart people. They're effective about getting explosions and death on TV screens, and they know it affects Americans because we're good people; we're compassionate; we care about human life. Every life matters. And therefore, when human life is taken through a car bomb, it causes people to say, is it worth it? Does it matter what happens over there?

See, one of the interesting things about this war I forgot to tell you is, unlike, say, the Vietnam war, that if we fail in Iraq, the enemy won't be content to stay there. They will follow us here. That's what different about this struggle than some of the others we've had. What happens overseas matters.

We ask this question a lot about how we can do a better job. As I say, Ryan Crocker and David Petraeus are briefing today. It's good to have them on TV, on these talk shows and stuff like that, but they've also got a job to do. And they're very credible people because they see firsthand what's going on. But they've got a lot of work to do over there as they command these troops.

I hope you're doing okay. I'll tell you something interesting in meeting with the families of the fallen. I get all kinds of opinions, of course. But one of the most universal opinions I get is one, I'm proud of my son; two, he was a volunteer; and three, do not let his life be in vain, Mr. President, you complete the mission. [Applause] Thank you, brother.

All right, guess what? You got to get to work. [Laughter] And so do I. Thank you all for giving me a chance to come and visit with you. I found this to be an interesting ex-

change. I appreciate your questions. I hope you have a better sense for why and how I have made decisions that have affected the individual lives of our citizens, as well as the life of our Nation. I'm an optimistic person. I believe that those decisions were not only necessary, but I firmly believe they will yield the peace that we all want; peace of mind and peace of heart. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Darrell Freeman, Sr., executive committee chairman, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce; Cordia Harrington, chief executive officer, the Bun Companies; Al McCree, owner and chief executive officer, Altissimo! Recordings; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John C. Danforth; Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the United Nations; and Johnny Sutton, U.S. District Attorney for the Western District of Texas. A participant referred to Azzam Alwash, director, Eden Again Project. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Members of Military Support Organizations

July 20, 2007

Good morning. Thank you all for coming. I'm joined by veterans and military families who are here to express support for our troops and their mission in Iraq, and I want to thank you all for being here today.

We've just finished a really good meeting. In our discussions, these folks had a message that all of us in Washington need to hear: It is time to rise above partisanship, stand behind our troops in the field, and give them everything they need to succeed.

In February, I submitted to Congress a Defense Department spending bill for the upcoming fiscal year that will provide funds to upgrade our equipment for our troops in Iraq and provides a pay raise for our military. It's a comprehensive spending request that Congress has failed to act on. Instead, the Democratic leaders chose to have a political

debate on a precipitous withdrawal of our troops from Iraq. The House and Senate are now scheduled to leave for their August recess before passing a bill to support our troops and their missions. Even Members of Congress who no longer support our effort in Iraq should at least be able to provide an increase in pay for our troops fighting there.

When Congress returns after Labor Day, there will be less than 1 month before the fiscal year ends and current funds for Defense Department operations run out. Congress still has an opportunity to do right by our men and women in uniform and our national security. So today I call on Congress to take action, get this vital piece of legislation to me to sign, on budget and on time.

I also ask Congress to give our troops time to carry out our new strategy in Iraq. Like all wars, the fight in Iraq has had frustrating setbacks. It's also had important successes. We've seen dramatic turnarounds in places such as Anbar Province, which was once thought lost to the enemy. Just this week, our military forces announced the capture of one of Al Qaida's top Iraqi leaders. He helped to form what Al Qaida calls the "Islamic State in Iraq," in an attempt to replicate what the Taliban had created in Afghanistan. Today that leader is under arrest, and his followers are under siege.

These successes demonstrate the gains our troops are making in Iraq and the importance of giving our military the time they need to give their new strategy a chance to work.

Earlier this year, the Senate seemed to share that view. They confirmed General David Petraeus as commander of our forces without a single dissenting vote. And now, barely a month after his strategy became fully operational, many of those same Senators are saying that that strategy has failed.

Our Nation deserves a serious debate about Iraq, because the outcome of this conflict will have enormous consequences for our country. Failure in Iraq would allow terrorists to operate from a safe haven with access to the world's third largest oil reserves. Failure in Iraq would increase the probability that at some later date, American troops would have to return to Iraq to confront an enemy more dangerous and more entrenched. Failure in Iraq would send an un-

mistakable signal to America's enemies that our country can be bullied into retreat.

America's involvement in Iraq does not have to end this way. A free and stable Iraq is still in reach. It has the potential to transform the Middle East and bring us closer to the day when radical regimes are replaced by peaceful allies, when terrorists have fewer places to train and operate, and when moms and dads in the Arab world see a future of hope for their children.

One of the folks with us today is an Air Force reservist named Eric Egland. Here's what he said, he said, "We live in the world's oldest democracy and have been blessed with the strength to protect our freedoms and to help others who seek the same."

This has always been America's mission, and today, that mission is being carried out by brave men and women who have stepped forward to keep our country secure. I thank them and I thank their families for the sacrifices they're making. And I thank you all for supporting them.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:42 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Khaled Abdul-Fattah Dawoud Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, ranking leader of Al Qaida in Iraq, who was captured in Mosul on July 4; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

July 14

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

July 15

In the afternoon, on the South Lawn, the President participated in an interview with Karl Ravech of ESPN.